

A BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE PUBLICATION

Drama

THE QUARTERLY
THEATRE REVIEW

EDITED BY IVOR BROWN

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WINTER 1959

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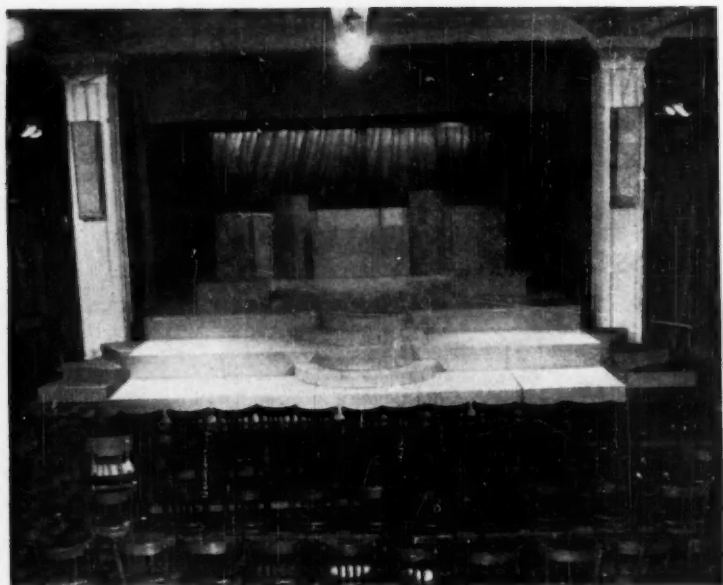
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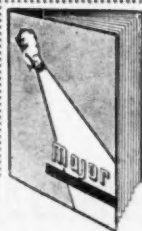
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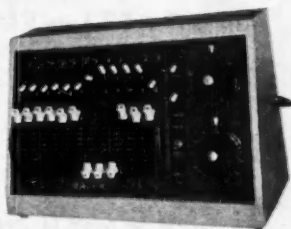
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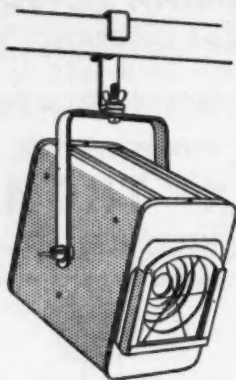
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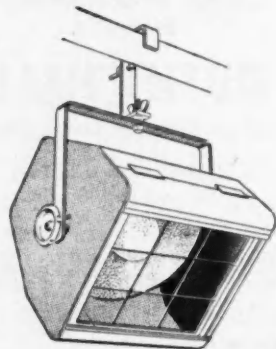
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WINTER 1959

NUMBER 55

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DRAMA appears in *The Subject Index to Periodicals, London*,
and *The International Index to Periodicals, New York*.

Neither the Editor nor the British Drama League accepts responsibility for opinions expressed in signed articles.

Editor: Ivor Brown

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A BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE PUBLICATION



SELF-HELP

THERE is a Victorian ring about the word self-help. It brings to mind that remarkable figure Samuel Smiles—doctor, journalist and counsellor of youth. He advocated energy, thrift and self-reliance, virtues not always agreeable to the young idea.

Mr. Colin Wilson has recently scolded with some justice our 'age of defeat' from whose literature and drama the 'hero' has been too long exiled. He is bored with the 'beatniks' as America calls the despairing pessimists. It is sadly true that in the 'advanced' theatre of these years the central figures have often been un-heroic; they either scream with self-pity or curse everything and everybody. The description 'Angry Young Men' has been worked to death. 'Dismal Young Drips' might be fresher and no less accurate.

The cause for their moaning and groaning is not easy to discover since rarely, if ever, in British history can more have been done by the old (or middle-aged) for the young. Mr. Osborne's famous Jimmy Porter had had a free University education and came into a world of full employment, neither of which advantages could his father have enjoyed. The young self-pitiers might further remember and gratefully admit that if it had not been for the courage and self-sacrifice of those just older than themselves they would have matured as serfs in a German-conquered and Nazi-regimented Britain.

It is true that in all ages it has been a habit of youth to cosset gloom, mainly in a manner of literary affectation. Even the vigorous Elizabethans delighted in the anatomy of melancholy. 'In sooth, I know not why I am so sad', said Shakespeare's Venetian Antonio, adding that he could not explain his dumps. Robert Burton gave some of the answers. But the young were soon out and about. They did not stay loafing about the forest like the preverse and pensive Jaques. They became active, acquisitive and creative. Antonio had his argosies. They knew how to help themselves, in both senses of the phrase. But the Queen's subjects did not only fill their pockets at Spain's expense: they filled volumes to the country's glory and the world's advantage.

Now we are continually told that youth is moping at a loose end. Even in the New Towns, which were to be such Utopian exchanges for the over-crowded cities, the cry of 'Nothing to do when work is done' is frequently heard. Samuel Smiles could have said a thing or two to these melancholics. There is always something to be done. Leisure is a challenge as well as a relief.

To encourage self-help in entertainment is one of the functions of the British Drama League. If the bewildered young cannot see good professional drama they can turn to making their own. The Junior Drama League is ready and eager to assist the teenagers and the League itself advises, trains, and supplies the necessary books and play-texts. The task is to let those who are bored by their leisure discover good ways to fill the vacuum caused by their own listlessness.

This cannot be left to the London office. Self-help is as much the function of the League's individual members and member-societies as of its central staff. Wherever this complaint of 'Nothing to do' is heard, those who believe in the uses of drama should tell the disconsolate that there is plenty to be done and done with pleasure by the making and enjoyment of plays.

The Smiles volume on self-help has recently had its centenary. It has been laughed at chiefly by those who have never read it. Call Smiles an Old Bore, if you will, but he had a word even for the newest of our New Towns.

PLAYS IN PERFORMANCE

By J. W. LAMBERT

NOT to make extravagant claims, the most interesting thing in the London theatre during the late Summer and Autumn of 1959 has been no new arrival but the survival of Theatre Workshop's contributions to the West End whirl—*The Hostage* and *A Taste of Honey*. One is hearty and whimsical, the other gentle and whimsical; both are fragmentary, both are more than a little squalid. Their success is encouraging because both are theatrically speaking alive. We don't need all our plays to be like them; but we should not forbear to cheer when conventional playmaking moulds are cracked.

New examples of significant drama have proved, alas, strikingly insignificant. The most enjoyable, if such a word be permitted, was given for one performance only, on a Sunday night at the Royal Court; as it has a cast of twenty-nine and runs for only eighty minutes or so it is clearly less than appealing to a commercial management. It is an early play by Arnold Wesker, *The Kitchen*, populated by the chefs and waitresses who keep a large popular restaurant ticking over. They too, we readily believe, have their dreams and frustrations; Mr. Wesker spins them sympathetically out of his gastronomic inferno, and as he leads his play to a violent climax (there has been a good deal of violence about) seems to suggest a wider frame of reference.

John Arden's frame of reference in *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, also at the Royal Court, is too wide by half. He seems to want to say a great deal about social organisation and individual vision in this fable of a strike-bound, frost-gripped North country town which receives a visit, or rather a visitation, from three soldiers and a sergeant purporting to be a recruiting party. They are nothing of the sort, and their

leader is clearly mad, which seems to make nonsense of whatever message Mr. Arden is trying to deliver. Nevertheless there was in performance a sense of power, of menace and of pain which suggests that Mr. Arden has the root of writing for the theatre in him. He was finely served by Jocelyn Herbert's haunted sets; Lindsay Anderson's direction to my mind over-stressed the already strong Teutonic flavour, so that it was hardly possible not to see in Freda Jackson's brooding pubkeeper and Patsy Byrne's battered barmaid an echo of Mother Courage and Katrin. The whole cast dealt effectively with Mr. Arden's turns into ballad-doggerel; and Ian Bannen as the sergeant repeated, by this time with a slightly hysterical air, his skilful rendering of a man on the verge of total breakdown.

The biggest surprise of the quarter was provided by the Arts Theatre in the shape of *My Friend Judas*. Mr. Andrew Sinclair has rapidly acquired a reputation on account of two novels, some academic successes and, I take it, a striking personality. From one of his novels he has himself carved this ludicrous play. At Cambridge yet another self-conscious roughneck from the provinces thrashes about between a jolly decent Old Etonian, a decadent aesthete, a pipe-smoking tutor, and an inconstant girl. Mr. Sinclair's situations are equalled in banal absurdity only by his dialogue; Fred Sadoff's production infallibly made every false step clump, and of the cast only Dinsdale Landen, as the Misfit who Made Good, was able to appear anything but absurd. Equally unsuccessful, *The Ark* at the Westminster appeared almost respectable, though not even Denholm Elliott's Shem, a poet and humanist impotent amid the brute creation of his brothers before the approaching flood, could stave off all-engulfing tedium.



'SERJEANT MUSGRAVE'S DANCE' by John Arden at the Royal Court Theatre. Ian Bannen, Frank Finlay, Freda Jackson and Patsy Byrne. Photo: Tony Armstrong Jones.

Ireland, with some help from the United States, contributed two squibs. Sean O'Casey's *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* arrived at the Royal Court from the Edinburgh Festival and, shall we say, had its moments. Here the Church is crudely set up opposite the Life Force. Father Domineer at least enabled Patrick Magee for once to shave and abandon his Beckett growl; his eyes as usual burned like coals, but he was given only a caricature to project. Two disreputably reputable old men had most of the fun, and while Wilfred

Lawson carried his eccentric timing and curdled yelps to the point of gibberish, J. G. Devlin, bent and black and seamed, bore the burden of worldliness with native relish.

The Ginger Man (Fortune Theatre) was published as a novel long before Mr. Osborne sent the Angry Young Man blazing across our stages, and it is perhaps a pity that Mr. Donleavy has waited so long to make his book into a play. Here are the familiar figures—the loud-mouthed young dreamer, averse from work, married above him,

and his chill, defeated wife. Neither of them was of very much interest in Philip Wiseman's production; Richard Harris hardly carried enough vocal guns to keep his windbag inflated, and relapsed into monotonous noise too often, while Wendy Craig was sadly miscast as a Kensington girl, besides being fitted out with strangely inept lines, most of which could not possibly have been spoken by any English girl for at least thirty years. To the rescue came two subsidiary characters—a dogged but defeated American to whom Ronald Fraser gave a wonderful mooning gloom, and a woman declining into lonely middle age to whom Isabel Dean brought wilting charm. Mr. Donleavy's command of language, like Brendan Behan's, is not equal to the demands he makes on it; but once again the contrast between conscientious squalor and spirited cursing produced its own theatrical titillation.

Europe offered two curiosities and one neat comedy. At the Lyric, Hammersmith, the first of Diego Fabbri's plays to be seen in London proved a tough nut. In *Man on Trial* a group of vagabond Jewish actors enact haphazardly the trial of Jesus; as a post-Pirandellian exercise in switching identities the piece was well-carpentered; but this business of members of the audience rising to take part in the play always disconcerts me, and I was hardly able to pay attention for fear of who was going to be roped in next. Back at the Arts we were given our first sight of Friedrich Dürrenmatt, a highly esteemed Swiss writer whose plays have been widely diffused by the B.B.C. and whose *The Visit*, with the Lunts produced by Peter Brook, toured the provinces but failed to find a London theatre, and was thus forced to trundle off to success in New York. Dürrenmatt is an exceedingly clever manipulator of the macabre with a firm grasp of all the contemporary tricks of the trade. *The Marriage of Mr. Mississippi* echoes practically every first-rate dramatist of the twentieth century in both its

methods and its themes. The fanatic who swears by the law, given a fine cold grace by Douglas Wilmer; the fanatic who swears by destruction, and the fanatic who clings to simple-minded goodness and the brandy bottle are all equally undone by Olympia, the doll-like, indiscriminately devoted incarnation of the feminine principle. Farce, high comedy, melodrama and pathos are liberally intermingled; and Clifford Williams stylised his production to bundle up all these, along with frequent addresses to the audience of a superficially Brechtian kind. The result, though never quite in the highest class, was funnier, more stimulating and more theatrically effective than any play by a native writer during this period.

Marcel Achard's *Patate* has been running for rather more than three years in Paris; it is an excellent little play—a character-study, in effect, of a very familiar figure: the man in whom, though he is full of plans, a streak of moral cowardice and spiritual meanness intervenes to turn all to dust and ashes, and who is driven back on a spiteful buffoonery to cover his own erratic tracks. The danger in bringing this piece—now known as *Rollo*—across the Channel to the Strand was of course that we should soften it up, emphasize the 'lovable' aspects of this awful little man; but this has been almost entirely avoided in Felicity Douglas's version, and while Gwen Cherrill as his wife, and Jacqueline Ellis as his daughter, let us see what is good in him, Leo McKern never played for sympathy. He gave us Rollo sponging, revengeful, gloating, grovelling—even affectionate in a possessive kind of way. This was a virtuoso turn, a piece of high-level clowning.

John Clements and Kay Hammond imported from the U.S.A. *The Marriage-Go-Round* (Piccadilly), produced, I can't think why, by Robert Helpmann. The idea was to point up the difference of precept and practice in the lives of a couple of academic sociologists whose long-standing happy marriage is threatened by a beautiful young woman



WILFRED LAWSON and J. G. DEVLIN in Sean O'Casey's 'Cock-a-Doodle Dandy' at the Royal Court Theatre. Photograph by Guy Gravett.

with extravagant genetic theories of her own. The piece is so clumsily written that despite a sprinkling of good jokes there was nothing to be done with it but follow its two stars through their familiar, agreeable and totally wasted paces. H. E. Bates, also at the game of making a play out of one of his own novels, offered in *The Darling Buds of May* (Saville) his celebrated Larkin family, Kentish opportunists all fertility and appetite, the living contradiction, or so we are meant to see them, of the dim regimented joylessness of the Welfare State. One thing made it seem possible that this vision is not quite absurd—Elspeth March's performance as Ma Larkin. Raven-haired and ruddy, Miss March really did seem effortlessly to dispense a richness of living, an unstrained exuberance never tiresome because never forced. But for the rest Jack Minster's production seemed to wish to scale the whole thing down to

the limits of domestic comedy laced with sniggers about love-making; and Peter Jones as Pop, who should have been the wellspring of the whole evening, assumed for all his cries of 'perfick', the uneasy demeanour of a coster on the run.

We should not despise plays about minorities fighting for a decent life in hostile surroundings; but we are entitled to feel that they are all very much alike. Richard Beynon's *The Shifting Heart* (Duke of York's) gives us a group of Italians in a Melbourne suburb. But can he really have intended to make his Australians so horrible? Two Italian players, Mimo Billi and Clelia Matania, gave assured (and mercifully intelligible) performances in the well-established vein of Mediterranean mopping and mowing. Kenneth J. Warren and Madge Ryan (both last with us in *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*) repeated their powerful rasping studies of

morons. The result was a distressful anecdote, powerfully banged over. The same might be said of *One More River*, but Beverley Cross's play though violent enough, does not rely on violence for its grip. It is indeed a splendid piece of theatrical story-telling, marred only by Mr. Cross's efforts to hammer home his theme—which concerns the acceptance of responsibility—and his wish to be up to date in supplying psychological explanations for nearly everything. Without any such trimmings his weary British cargo-boat, waiting in an African anchorage, its Captain dead, its neurotic though handsome young Mate in charge, its Bosun old and tired and divided in his loyalties, its crew on the verge of mutiny, makes theatrical sense. At the Westminster Robert Shaw's Mate, tense with the consciousness of past failure, was more than a cardboard tyrant; Paul Rogers's Bosun presented very quietly the man who cannot quite rise to an occasion, though he can run any ship and cow any sailor; and Guy Hamilton's production worked up small-part playing of a very high standard indeed.

With the last despairing howls of the Mate battered down to die in the bowels of his ship we take leave of violence; and before turning to classic revivals consider two period pieces. *The Edwardians* (Saville), made by Ronald Gow from the novel by V. Sackville-West, is reduced in the process from a rich study in changing times to a passably amusing account, elegantly dressed by Gladys Calthrop, of an enterprising young Duke and his reluctantly abandoned adultery. Jeremy Brett takes the Duke easily, Ambrosine Phillpotts looks and sounds like Zena Dare, Athene Seyler steals several scenes from a wheelchair (any character in a wheelchair steals scenes) with her unfailingly successful battery of moues and brusqueries. It is left to Helen Cherry as the lady in the case, and Anthony Sharp as her husband, to put a little edge on the proceedings. Both achieve remarkable modulations, she

from brittle amoral decoration to acceptance of a disagreeable destiny, he from conventional upper-class idiocy to the authority of wounded pride. Only in their short scene together does the play become more than tittle-tattle.

Tittle-tattle of the highest possible quality is of course what Henry James gives us. Some have complained that Michael Redgrave's adaptation of *The Aspern Papers* (Queen's) has betrayed James into unnecessary vulgarity by making the narrator the leading figure in the play and a heartless trifier. But that of course he is. The more James's works are made into plays (saddening irony, when one thinks how hard he tried, and how hopelessly, to write plays himself) the more clearly we see what a floss of superficial subtlety beclouds an abyss of servant-girl vulgarity. *The Aspern Papers* shows us a littérateur, a man of the world, hinting to a faded spinster affections he does not begin to feel, solely in order to wring from her aged aunt, once the mistress of a great poet, her letters and relics. At least he does not get them; and Sir Michael's version for the stage does through the mouth of Mrs. Prest (played with well-judged casual kindness by Pauline Jameson) shade in the narrator's character a little more fully, and therefore less brashly, than James himself does. No doubt Sir Michael foresaw the extreme dislike which this character, whom he embodies with a cold and faultless charm, would arouse if presented flatly in the flesh as he appears in the story. Beatrix Lehmann makes the elder of the two ladies he besieges a burning ghost, terrifying as she sits ramrod-straight in her wheelchair (another wheelchair!), but merely grotesque when she moves out of it and staggers across the stage like some uncontrollable puppet. The honours of the evening go to Flora Robson. Moving greyly through the dusty, neglected *palazzo* she warms to the visitor's address. Something—one can hardly call it hope—stirs within her, drives her on to offer a kind of bargain: for her,

escape—for him, the trunkful of papers. One can see in Miss Robson's movements, little by little more free, and hear in her voice, tone by tone both softer and more full, the thought of the possibility not perhaps of happiness, not

The young company made something amusing out of them all. But is that enough? These three works demand three quite different styles of playing. The Old Vic compromises by having no style at all. By style I do not of



'THE DOUBLE-DEALER' by Congreve at the Old Vic. Charles West, Judi Dench, Ursula Jeans and Donald Houston. Photograph by Houston Rogers.

even of love—but at least of life. This may rank with Lady Cicely Waynflete and Mrs. Alving as one of Miss Robson's finest assumptions.

The Old Vic opened its season with three comedies, by Shakespeare, Congreve, and Wilde—a taxing programme.

course mean airy flourishes; I mean a reasonable grace, a sense of period, and an understanding of rhythm and timing. *As You Like It* marked Wendy Toye's first Shakespearian production; she dressed it, in Malcolm Pride's pretty designs, in a style of eighteenth-century

fairyland—a fairly frosty fairyland, aptly enough, for Arden. Then she overloaded the play with so much 'amusing' business that its lyrical qualities vanished, though Barbara Jefford tried to keep Rosalind a note in music; but the rest of the cast was against her—Maggie Smith's harsh Celia, Donald Houston's excellent but angry Jaques, Alec McCowen's snappish Touchstone.

Michael Benthall himself has undertaken the other two productions. *The Double-Dealer* offers a more obvious occasion for the exercise of what is usually known as style. Mr. Benthall kept things within bounds; the trouble is that even everyday fluency of movement is apt to seem affected in British players to-day, so that both here and in *The Importance of Being Earnest* we seemed to be watching well-meaning impersonators. Miss Jefford consistently

escapes this censure; so, although he is always the same, does Miles Malleon (a splendid groping Chasuble) and so does Rosalind Atkinson—a Prism not far short of Margaret Rutherford. So, of course, in any normal circumstances, does Fay Compton, so much an actress that she long ago went through the sound-barrier of characterisation; but here, as Lady Bracknell, she seemed (and no wonder) oppressed. But why should younger players like John Justin and Alec McCowen seem so consistently ill at ease? Mr. McCowen in particular continues to puzzle me. His skills are not in doubt; but why does he under-line every gesture, italicise every phrase?

What is missing is the art that conceals art. The result is often jolly (witness the barbed and swanlike folly of Moyra Fraser's Lady Froth) but it is not really acting.

TWO PLAYERS: TWO CRITICS

By W. BRIDGES-ADAMS

ELEONORA DUSE was born in the autumn of 1858 at a modest *albergo* in Lombardy. She died in the spring of 1924 at a (no doubt) superb hotel in Pittsburg. Brought home with almost royal honours, she was laid to rest at Asolo, as she had wished. In celebration of her centenary, the lady who was for many years her intimate friend and secretary has compiled a pictorial record of her life; it includes a number of letters, playbills and press-cuttings in facsimile and a brief biographical sketch. The English edition is now available, and is introduced by Ivor Brown.*

He was fortunate enough to see her, if only during her last London season, when her vitality was ebbing but her spell, it seems, was as potent as ever.

So he is able to give us a first-hand impression which in no way belies the Duse legend. Nevertheless, like the rest of us, he turns back to that far-away summer of 1895. It was a year of some note for the London stage. Consider: in January *The Ideal Husband*, the booing of *Guy Domville* (which virtually ended Henry James's hopes as a playwright) and *King Arthur* at the Lyceum, Burne-Jones and Sullivan assisting; in February *The Importance of Being Earnest*; in March the pseudo-Ibsenite *Mrs. Ebbsmith* and Lugné-Poé with the *Théâtre de l'Oeuvre* in the real thing. On May 25th Irving's knighthood was announced and Wilde vanished into the abyss. On the 27th Sarah Bernhardt appeared at Daly's in *Gismonda*; on June 5th Duse appeared at Drury Lane in *La Femme de Claude*. On the 10th Bernhardt received her customary ovation as Magda in a translation of Sudermann's

* *Eleonora Duse* by Olga Signorelli. Thames & Hudson. £3 3s.

Heimat, only to be annihilated by Duse in the same part forty-eight hours later. That at least was the word used by Bernard Shaw, when he contributed to the next issue of *The Saturday Review* a comparison between the two artists which is likely to endure so long as the English-speaking races continue to be interested in fine acting or fine criticism.

Reading it, we have to bear in mind that Shaw did not, as he later said, make any claim to the divine attribute of justice. On the contrary he believed himself committed to a holy war against the kind of drama that Irving fostered, the kind of acting of which Bernhardt was the most splendid exponent; and he gave no quarter. Duse's acting was of the kind he had a use for; accordingly his onslaught on the Immortal Sarah was as devastating as it was irreverent. Her abounding theatricality, the peach-bloom on her cheeks, the long, slow smile that not only appealed to his sensibilities but positively jogged them, the bravura of her tirades, her golden voice—of which he said that anyone who found melody in that monotone would find exquisite curves in a packing-case: merits and demerits alike came under blistering review. But when he turns to Duse we feel that here is, after all, a rather noble kind of axe-grinding, for he writes from the heart, his advocacy glows with love and wonder. The lines and the grey shadows on her face, he says, are the credentials of her humanity, the momentary tremor of her lip is something to be felt rather than seen; she has the grace of a fine animal, but behind every stroke of her acting there is a distinctively human idea; she is unspeakably touching because she is exquisitely considerate. Then follow those ringing lines which I am sorry to say are mangled in quotation on the dust-cover:

No physical charm is noble as well as beautiful unless it is the expression of a moral charm; and it is because Duse's range includes these moral high notes, if I may so express myself, that her compass, extending from the depths of a mere predatory creature like Claude's wife up to Marguerite Gauthier

at her kindest or Magda at her bravest, so immeasurably dwarfs the poor little octave and a half on which Sarah Bernhardt plays such pretty canzonets and stirring marches.

It was an uplifted Shaw, the best of all possible Shaws, who walked back that night to his untidy room in Fitzroy Square.

Now for a mystery which so far as I know has never been satisfactorily explained. Bernhardt was at this time fifty, and Duse was thirty-seven. When Duse was forty-two she came to London again; Max Beerbohm saw her, and she left him cold.

'Max' had succeeded G.B.S. in the drama columns of *The Saturday Review*. He himself was diffident about his qualifications but, as events proved, no better assignment could have been made. Times were changing; the strenuous 'nineties were drawing to a close, and the battle for the Advanced Drama seemed well on the way to being won. In the mellower years that lay ahead the crusading note that Shaw had sounded would have been out of the mode. The spruce and sprightly Max, with his dandified pretence that one must not get over-excited about actors and actresses (whom he did not please by lumping them together as 'mimes') was the very man for the Edwardian stage. Confronted with fine work he discarded his pose and responded warmly; confronted with vulgarity he could be vitriolic (read him on *The Light that Failed* and *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*); he deflated pretentiousness of every sort with a stiletto-thrust of wit that was as deadly as Shaw's slapstick: it is doubtful whether any man did more to save the ardent young of his generation from squandering their enthusiasm on unworthy objects. Unlike Shaw, he was in no way committed; he was at liberty to rejoice in Sarah as she gloriously and stunningly was. This he did, although not without reservations, even ragging her gaily when she was absurd; when she attempted Hamlet he suppressed his mirth until he had left the theatre and

then wrote that the Princess of Denmark was *très grande dame*. But for all her tricks of the trade he found her genuine at heart. How shattering, then, to learn that for all the earnestness and moral rectitude of Duse he perceived in her (in the artist's sense of the word) something a little bogus.

He was no feminist; any assumption of female superiority roused the imp in him. Acutely conscious of his heresy, he declined to be edified by this great actress. She was, he declared, a supernatural phenomenon, making for righteousness; if a fiery chariot had been seen waiting at the stage door no one would have been much surprised. Moreover, how could one rave about her technique when, not knowing Italian as his brother critics apparently did, one could not judge with what aptness she suited voice and gesture to the word? Or about her conception of character when in every part, whether Magda or Fédora or Paula Tanqueray, she was precisely the same woman? Or about her personality when one's impression, transcending that of her charm and grace, was of 'a great egoistic force; of a woman overriding, with an air of sombre unconcern, plays, mimes, critics and public'? And how are we, faced with this monstrous picture, to reconcile it with the Duse that Shaw had extolled five years before?

Great actresses can, and sometimes do, 'go off'; in what direction is largely a matter of temperament. Without using the grand words extrovert and introvert one can surmise that a Bernhardt is in danger of becoming shoppy, and that a Duse, almost too fine for this rough world, must be on her guard against becoming *exaltée*. Did that in fact happen? And if so why, and how?

She began and ended as a trouper, with distinguished professional ancestry on her father's side. But she was much given to self-communion, and for twelve years, broken only by a brief appearance on the film, she lived in strict retirement from the stage; there were times when she thought of her art with

detestation. We cannot imagine Bernhardt doing either — yet, ironically enough, it was the young Bernhardt, fresh from the bondage of the *Comédie française*, who first planted in her the seeds of a divine discontent with the banalities of the contemporary drama. Much later, although before Max saw her, she came under the influence of D'Annunzio, who some said was the ruin of her. It does seem that he took more than he gave, and he was disloyal both as a lover and as a fellow artist; was he guilty of more heinous sins? Did he lure her still further from life with his high-flown talk of a Poets' Theatre? Worse, did he exhaust her spirit, so that what Max saw was but a simulacrum of what Shaw had seen? I do not know whether she ever put on *When We Dead Awaken*; if she did, she may have thrown new light on that intriguing work, and on her own history.

In some of the photographs in the book, taken during her middle years, there is indeed a lifelessness which might seem to support this conjecture, were it not that in *La Città Morta*, just a year after Max saw her, she was manifestly as vibrant as ever; that of course was D'Annunzio's play. Some of the earlier ones are ravishing. If more than passable comeliness, with that spirit shining through it, is not beauty, what is beauty? She is reserved but not aloof and certainly not cold, most huggable in fact; but for the resolution, as yet half-formed, in that young face one would wish to divert her from the hard and lonely road she was to tread. But the Duse of the tremulous mouth and lovely hands, of the unconquerable will, is already there. As the subtler and more precious charm of her maturity suffuses her we can note with Ivor Brown how the camera-men were defeated by it and were fain to leave it to the painters. But they caught up with her at last; the final portrait is of a wraith, all fire and air. This Duse, her pilgrimage nearly over, has no need to worry about what Mr This or Mr That thought of her in 1895

or 1900.

Supposing you who read this are by any chance a young actress: which of the two had you rather be? The amaz-

one, so withdrawn, so self-questioning, so dedicated, who had nothing to offer but her art and, when the end came, was impatient to go? Both, be it



ELEONORA DUSE in 'FROU-FROU'
Reproduced from 'Eleonora Duse' by Olga Signorelli

ing Bernhardt, who neither could nor would keep out of the headlines, and whose hold on life was so strong that when at last she lost her leg, hip and all, she went on playing; or that other

remarked, were of true stage stuff; neither of them owed her ascendancy to an inspired director and a team of adroit technicians. Duse in particular had played Juliet (at fourteen, the very

age) in the great amphitheatre of Verona; her quietest effects, like the blush she could summon at will, were registered on the stage of Drury Lane: I dare not ask whether there are microphones there to-day, because I am so afraid of being told that there are. If however you find that choice too exact-

your way about the other arts as the child-wife of a celebrated painter, to serve a sterner apprenticeship as the consort of a man of genius, and finally to emerge as leading lady at the Lyceum, and enliven that serious establishment by sliding down the banisters from your dressing room?



SARAH BERNHARDT in 'FROU-FROU'

ing, there are alternatives. One immediately suggests itself. Would you like, at some slight sacrifice of greatness, to be remembered as more radiant than flamboyant, and to live your life untroubled by deep sorrow or the cold menace of self-doubt? To draw your first money at the age of nine, to learn

Ellen Terry had four more years to live, Duse a few months, when that last London season opened. After the play Duse would see no one, but Dame Ellen insisted. Cochran ushered her into the presence, and withdrew, delicately, as those two embraced, and laughed, and cried.

FROM BLOOD TO MUD

By IVOR BROWN

MANY researches have been made into the plays of Shakespeare; has anyone, I wonder, ever totted up the number of corpses that had to be shifted by the still living actors from a curtainless stage after the stabbings and the poisonings as well as the natural deaths were over? The minor players had to do some strenuous work as morgue-menials, and a modern Smithfield porter might shrink from the amount of carrion-transport then accepted by the actors. It was all part of the business when tragedy was on the bill. The South Bank audiences wanted blood in the theatre as much as they enjoyed it in the neighbouring bearpits and bullrings of Paris Garden. The dramatists had their living to make and so their killings to provide. It was fortunate that they were also able to contribute far more than homicide and even more fortunate and most remarkable that the audience would swallow great poetry along with the generous helping of gore.

We have abundance of murder in the whodunnit plays of our time; but one body usually suffices and that may be dispatched with a shot off-stage or knocked cold with that favourite gadget of the murder story 'a blunt instrument'. The audience likes a corpse in the cupboard but does not insist on a sanguinary mess on the stage. Furthermore it has been discovered down the centuries that tragedy does not necessitate physical outrage. This is all to the good, since we can rarely supply the wonderful verbal garnishing with which the Elizabethans mitigated their banquets of cold meat.

The theatre of to-day, however, has its own excess of ugliness, and the favour shown to scenes of squalor has remained distressingly constant. We may have got rid of the gore, but we do have our

noses rubbed in the garbage. It may be the moral garbage of the boozing, ranting, despairing, cantankerous types known as 'beatniks' who mingle non-stop nagging with occasional bashing. It has become almost customary when one goes to see a play deemed 'progressive' to be confronted with a slum set whose chief properties are dustbins. The assistant stage-managers of to-day might reasonably apply for membership of the Dustman's Section of a General Workers' Union. This applies not only to the products of London and Dublin. If America and Australia send their products over here the audience need not expect any view of happiness in a free, open and expanding world. When Mr. Beynon's play about Melbourne, *The Shifting Heart*, was staged here, the garbage can was overflowing as well as present, and part of the neighbourly warfare actually consisted of blocking-up the drains of 'next door'. The setting would have been wholly apposite to the most squalid backyard in the most dismal of English slums.

The play contained the usual flow of drink and a lot of race-riot blood-letting. If any picture of Australian life could have been calculated to make one shudder at the thought of emigration to that part of the Commonwealth, here it was. I am not considering or criticising the quality of the writing and acting. My point is that the routine provision of poverty among refuse is the essence of a modern 'advanced' play. Not long ago the Royal Court Theatre offered us a piece entitled *Live Like Pigs* which amply justified its name.

Here we have a natural reaction to the previous convention of the theatre that the lounge-hall of a prosperous home was the inevitable setting of a successful piece and that only the wealthier people had problems worth

discussing or comedy situations worth exploiting. The successful West End playwrights, from Pinero to Coward and Somerset Maugham, worked on the accepted convention that the public in all parts of the house wanted to see a play with a setting agreeable to the eye and also to observe on the actresses the kind of dresses that were coming into fashion. That was, of course, to narrow the theatre, excluding much that was of contemporary interest. Here was certainly not that kind of public forum which Shaw demanded and, in his own work, created.

Yet Shaw, with all his Socialist intentions, very rarely took the drama on a slumming excursion. His arch revolutionist, John Tanner, was a member of the Idle Rich class. When asked why he stuck to middle class or wealthy people and surroundings, Shaw replied that for the dramatist it was the best policy to avoid writing about people with constricted lives: freedom of movement made playwriting much easier. He might make an occasional dive into a Salvation Army Centre, or an East End tailors' sweat-shop. But on the whole he found his best thinkers and talkers in the Factory Board Room or the seats of Government. So he avoided the old drama of blood and the present vogue of mud.

In my youth I would have welcomed a play with a pigsty title because I was surfeited with lounge-halls and the library at Earlham Towers. It was a great relief to find in the new drama of my early playgoing that the constricted life of city or factory workers and their wives was, though evaded by Shaw, presented by St. John Ervine, Stanley Houghton and the Manchester School. But Ervine, having created Jane Clegg, did not think it necessary to give us nothing but the problems of a humdrum life in which a shilling could be a large matter.

It is a fair complaint against the 'advanced' drama of to-day that it has tilted the balance too far in the dustbin direction. Of course we need a theatre

which will cover the whole panorama of contemporary life. But our Britain of the middle century is developing in a variety of ways which are not merely squalid. The gang warfare and senseless violence of the Teddy Boys, a general as well as a British phenomenon, is only the ugly part of a new social pattern in which new towns of decent aspect and high wages, bringing new amenities to those who would never have dreamed of them thirty or forty years ago, are creating a society which is not living only poorly or piggishly. The sociologist may call ours a superficial prosperity, but there is a new workers' (or strikers') Britain which is not being mirrored in stage portraiture. I include the word 'strikers', because I recently noticed on TV a picture of a strikers' meeting to which the assembled crowd had mostly arrived by motorcycle—and some by car. We are catching up with America.

It is an extraordinary fact that, while all nations are busily and expensively engaged in propaganda designed to impress the world with the excellence of their way of life, one quite powerful medium of information concentrates not on the best that is being freshly achieved but on the worst that is lingering on. Judge the U.S.A. by its export of plays and you would think that the American nation consisted only of the more deplorable inhabitants of the Deep South, an unimportant section of a vast, active and ambitious population. Now Australia lets us know that Melbourne can be as shabby as the worst purloins of the East End of London, which, incidentally, is being steadily rebuilt on creditable lines. But I know that Australia has a larger life than we are permitted to visualise. Ireland sends us, through Messrs. Behan and Donleavy, its tumultuous ragings and scoldings of urban types which represent only a fraction of life in a mainly agricultural community.

I am certainly not asking for a return only to lounge-halls, spotless tennis-party flannels, and the amorous peccadilloes of the impeccably tailored and

gowned. In an article in the *Observer* Alan Pryce-Jones welcomed an escape from the 'grey gentility' of the french-window and lounge-hall comedies of the 'last twenty years'. He was wrong in his dating, for the well dressed 'cock-tail comedy' was dominant long before that. I would not apply the adjective 'grey' to them: grey, mud-coloured and murky are epithets surely more applic-

able to the dustbin drama of to-day, despite the luridness of the language. If it be the theatre's function to present a true picture of our society as a whole, what we need is neither a spate of slum plays in backyards nor a monotony of smart comedy in luxury flats or country houses. A just balance is the true requirement of a representative national drama.

CHRISTMAS IN THE THEATRE

By JOHN COUNSELL

NO season of the year is steeped in such a wealth of tradition as Christmastide. This arises naturally from its coincidence with the winter solstice which from time immemorial has been among all races of mankind the occasion for feasting and the celebration of tribal rites. The evolution of Christmas as we know it to-day begins, as every schoolboy knows, with the Roman Saturnalia, marking the celebration of the *sol invictus*. The Church unable to stamp out this very popular festival spiritualised it as the feast of the nativity of the Sun of Righteousness. When Christianity spread northward it encountered a similar pagan festival, also held at the winter solstice, the great Yule feast of the Norsemen. Once again Christmas absorbed heathen customs—the Yule log, the decorating of houses with mistletoe and holly, and the provision of a feast, the ingredients of which became themselves traditional. The proximity of the feast of Saint Nicholas, who among many other things was the patron saint of little boys, brought him upon the Christmas scene with his Dutch nickname of Santa Claus.

It is appropriate therefore that the contribution of the world of entertainment to this great festival should be both traditional and dedicated to children. By great good fortune the

means are ready to hand.

It happens that from the beginning of the early eighteenth century when John Weaver, a Shrewsbury dancing master, first adapted elements of the Italian *Commedia dell'Arte* into the Harlequinade, there has existed in Britain, and in Britain alone, a form of entertainment which, with our love of a misnomer, we call Pantomime. This, through its long history, has had three characteristics; it has always been associated with Christmas; its form has been in an unceasing state of evolution, shedding one traditional facet as it formed a new one; and it has been declared on the point of death by each succeeding generation.

That it is a very peculiar form of entertainment no one could deny. To try to explain it to a foreigner is to expose oneself to the risk of being thought crazy. Yet it is its peculiarities, its essential Britishness and, above all, the fact that it is part of the tradition in which everyone in these islands has been brought up since childhood, that have won for it a deep-rooted affection in the hearts of all but the cynics. I am myself firmly convinced that it should and will remain the centrepiece of Christmas theatrical entertainment, provided that its essential traditions are preserved and no attempt is made to compromise with what are wrongly

considered to be the more sophisticated demands of a modern audience. It is because it is illogical, unsubtle and a hotch-potch that it is the ideal medium for giving delight to children and, as most of us retain a measure of childishness at heart, delight to grown-ups as well. It is a truism that 'anything can happen' in pantomime, and though to be guided by this too literally would result in chaos, it does provide more than any other theatrical form unlimited scope for imagination. Because one is not restricted by the constructional demands and straight narrative form of a play, one can introduce into it every form of entertainment that will appeal to a child changing from one to another with the simplicity of a shake of a kaleidoscope.

Let it be understood that I am not advocate of the horrible tasteless unco-ordinated jumble of variety turns, 'pop' songs and 'blue' patter, which nowadays are too often thrown together with scarcely even a shred of story and with a minimum of rehearsal, and labelled 'pantomime' by unscrupulous managers trading on the magic of the name. They have done a grave injury to a fine tradition and in the end have gone far to kill the goose that at one time laid them golden eggs. Twenty years ago I remember saying in jest 'I believe if, at the beginning of December, you rented a small shop in the middle of a town miles from any theatre, stuck up a notice saying "Book here for the Gorgeous Pantomime", and put a small boy behind the counter to take the money and dish out the tickets, you could clean up a small fortune before decamping on Christmas Eve'. Since those days the public has been let down too often to be so gullible. In disgust it has turned its back more and more on pantomime and sought other means of entertaining itself at Christmas time. Last year there were fewer pantomimes in the country than for many years, and most of those that were presented had drastically to curtail the length of their runs. At Windsor,

on the other hand, we take pride in the knowledge that every Christmas for the last twenty years the number of people who come to see our pantomimes has steadily grown. Starting with a two-week run we now pack out for six. There is a simple explanation for this. We always take very seriously our job of producing what I can only call a 'proper pantomime', regarding it as one of the most important productions of the year. Important because it is the means by which we stimulate in the very young a delight in theatre-going which will last them all their lives. Evidence of this is shown by the quite remarkable number of young people who come to this theatre throughout the year.

I can, perhaps, best explain what I mean by a 'proper pantomime' by describing the way we set about producing ours. In the first place it is primarily conceived from the point of view of the ten-year-old child, though there are always things in it that will enchant the two-year-old as well. Its essential elements are story, comedy, spectacle, magic, music, dancing and song, blended in such a way that one leads naturally to another. No single item is allowed to outlast the time that a child's interest can be held. The whole production breathes freshness, colour, youth, vigour and speed with what might be termed 'dead time' completely eliminated.

To deal with each element in turn. First, and most importantly, the story—*Cinderella*, *Jack and the Beanstalk* or whatever the particular subject happens to be—is kept firmly as the backbone of the whole structure. Every digression is linked to it, often flimsily it is true, but always in a manner that a child can accept quite naturally. It is written for the most part in simple prose, the rhyming couplet of tradition being reserved for Fairy and Demon and for occasions when it will heighten the effect. Since much of it is necessarily 'carried' by the Principals, Boy and Girl, they must be able to act as well as

sing. In our early pantomimes, in fact, acting took precedence over singing which, let it be admitted, was sometimes not so hot! Nowadays we go to endless pains to make sure that an

from a local convent). The comedians work to an agreed text and though they must necessarily be allowed a fairly free hand for spontaneous humour, they are severely discouraged from the kind of



DUNCAN LEWIS and BASIL LORD in 'Cinderella' at the Theatre Royal, Windsor, Christmas 1958. Photograph by David Barry.

equal balance is held between the two.

The comedy is robust, basic and largely visual. Occasionally honestly vulgar, it is never in the slightest degree suggestive. (It is part of our own particular tradition that the final dress rehearsal is always attended by the nuns

'ad libbing' that so often misfires and slows up proceedings. Any 'gag' that fails to make its laugh is immediately cut. Moreover they work as a team—there is none of the selfish cut-throat rivalry for laughs which mars so many pantomimes. If A thinks of a good gag

he is happy to give it to B if it would come more naturally from him.

There are always two ballets, one of twelve minutes at the end of the first half, the other, of about five minutes, in the middle of the second half. They are never extraneous to the story and are conceived in simple terms instantly recognisable to the child mind. On the other hand infinite pains are taken over their execution; the music for them is specially composed, and both the choreography and the dancing reach to something approaching Sadler's Wells standard.

Most of the songs are specially written and come naturally out of the story. The one or two 'pops' that are used are chosen to fit the context. A balance is kept between comedy and sentiment, with the latter kept to a minimum. Before we learnt the trick of it, the first strains of a sentimental song were the signal for a babble of chatter

from the children in the audience and a mass exodus to the lavatories!

Costumes and scenery are, of course, specially designed, fresh, colourful and, though not as lavish as those to be seen at the Palladium, are anything but stinted. Every opportunity is seized upon for magic effects with trick scenery and lighting, thus retaining with modern techniques the traditional transformation scene.

The whole pantomime is intensely rehearsed for three weeks, the final week being devoted to dress rehearsals, orchestra rehearsals (we have an orchestra of twelve) and a diligent 'playing in' before the paying public are admitted. In the course of the six weeks' run approximately 54,000 people come to see it, of all ages from two to a hundred. The *matinées* of the last two weeks are, in fact, packed by the very old, reliving, one feels, the joys of their youth.

SHAKESPEARE'S POETRY IN PERFORMANCE

By BERTRAM JOSEPH

DEVOTEES of the open stage or of the 'Elizabethan-type stage' often insist that it is very difficult to communicate the poetry of Shakespeare in theatres in which stage and auditorium are separated architecturally by a proscenium arch; it is argued that the very existence of the arch predisposes the audience to expect some sort of naturalistic production which is bound to conflict with what is required by Shakespeare's poetry. Another point which has been made is exemplified by Dr. Guthrie's recent statement that theatres of the size of the Memorial Theatre at Stratford-

upon-Avon make matters worse by demanding from the actors a virtuosity which few possess to-day. I have been led to question these opinions, however, by three performances seen in the last few weeks: they were *King Lear* and *Coriolanus* at Stratford, and *Romeo and Juliet* at the Theatre Royal, Bristol.

In each case the existence of a proscenium arch had not prevented designer and producer from using the stage fundamentally as an unlocated setting. The nearest we came to a naturalistic stage picture was with some of the realistically beautiful sets for *King Lear*; but with these as with

the settings of the other plays there was no suggestion that, because one set or one part of the set had been used as a background to one place in the action, it represented that single place whenever we saw it. Producer and designer may have had a more difficult task working with a proscenium arch, but that was not apparent as an obstruction to the mobility and fluidity of the staging. The audience responded by imagining that what they saw was the place which the performers took it to be. I do not think that the arch was responsible for the comparative failure of these performances as poetic experiences.

In each case the failure was primarily one of acting. Yet I find it difficult to regard these failures as exemplifying Dr. Guthrie's assertion that what is needed in speaking Shakespeare is an 'extraordinary virtuosity' if he is to 'come alive in a great operatic house'. The Theatre Royal, Bristol, is a small house, but *Romeo and Juliet* there was less poetic than *King Lear* at Stratford. It might be argued that the difference was due to greater technical competence at Stratford, where in this play the actors were for the most part competent physically and technically to do what was necessary. In each performance, however, it seemed to me that failure was due not to external technique, but to an inner inability of the actor to adjust himself to the demands of a Shakespearian role. This is not a matter of virtuosity or of achieving a specifically 'Shakespearian style', but of refusing to do with Shakespeare what an actor would certainly refuse to do with a naturalistic playwright. With a modern role actors are aware that every word they speak must be necessary to them if they are to externalise adequately what it is they are thinking, feeling and wanting in the person of the character. But they did not seem to have the same awareness of Shakespeare's words in these performances.

The failure to relate every word to the emotional life of the character was

apparent for instance when Volumnia turned on the tribunes who had driven her son from Rome. Shakespeare has made Volumnia express herself in an image which involves an awareness of the quality of the Capitol contrasted with that of the meanest house in Rome. Coriolanus and the Capitol are associated with nobility, strength, glory, beauty, each being essential to Rome's defence, ennobling the city which they dominate in grandeur. The meanest house and the populace are in complete contrast: they are flimsy, squalid, insecure; they degrade the city, contributing nothing to its strength, its grandeur or its safety. At Stratford, Volumnia externalised a conviction that her son was worth more than all the populace; she externalised indignation and contempt, but all in a comparatively generalised way which did not need these words and no others. Yet only these words can possibly be used to externalise what Shakespeare's Volumnia thinks, feels and wants. The failure to make the audience respond to the implications of the imagery was not one of virtuosity, of style or of verse-speaking. It derived from the inner lack of clear understanding of the relation between every word to be spoken and exactly what the actress or actor thinks, feels and wants in the person of the character.

Even when the actor is speaking Shakespeare's prose he often has poetic implications to imagine and to communicate, as in the case of the return of Menenius after his fruitless mission to Coriolanus. Still experiencing the appalling shock of his recent interview, he turns on Sicinius's inability to believe 'that so short a time can alter the condition of a man'. Menenius is still feeling the shock of finding himself with an utter stranger instead of with the man who had once treated him as a father. The well-known and well-loved Coriolanus is now the embodiment of a chilling hatred directed solely at the destruction of the Rome for which he often poured out his

blood; he is something remote from humanity, something intimidatingly and implacably destructive. It is a change which is almost beyond grasping, except that it is appallingly obvious in Coriolanus's treatment of the emissary. Menenius's words ask the actor to think and feel these thoughts and emotions; when he does so he needs the words, each of them, as Shakespeare has given them to him, if he is to externalise what he thinks, feels and wants, if he is to disturb the tribunes at least as much as he has been himself, if he is to express his malicious delight at their discomfiture, his feeling of irony as well as the shock and the contempt. But it seemed that at Stratford Menenius was externalising only a conviction that there was no escape and a contempt for those to whom he was speaking and who were responsible for the situation; as a result he did not need all the images which Shakespeare has given him; and while he spoke them he did not communicate their implications both for the character and for the play. For by adjusting himself to his words so that he needs them all, an actor not only communicates their implications for the character, but for the author and his audience. Here they relate the state of mind of Menenius at this moment not only to his recent interview, but to something in the character of Coriolanus which his old friend and the other patricians have never recognised until now: the images do not only express the speaker's sense of shock, they also express a valid view of Coriolanus, an implication of the action of the play as a whole.

Such implications are communicated most successfully by the actor who concentrates on his proper task of representing the character who needs the poetry to externalise what he is thinking, feeling and wanting. Thus, when Cordelia gives us a list of the weeds in her father's pitiable crown, Shakespeare has imagined her first sight of him on her return as funda-

mentally akin to what she last saw on leaving for France. Then he rejected everyone who could have sustained him and took to himself Goneril and Regan, and as it has turned out, Edmund, Cornwall and men of their kind. He is true to type even in his madness, and unerringly plucks weeds to adorn himself, weeds which are gross and colourful, rather than the healthy, unexciting, but 'sustaining' corn. Cordelia expresses in her list of weeds her feeling that this is her father's life: each weed is to her another of the follies by which he has harmed himself.

At Stratford, Cordelia gave us a catalogue of weeds at the same time as externalising a generalised feeling of regret and pity. For that, however, there was no need to mention each weed separately, nor to mention the sustaining corn, except as realistic detail in an account of where the weeds usually grow. But when what the actress has within her demands that she uses every word which Shakespeare has given her if she is to externalise her thought, emotion and desire completely, then a piece of descriptive imagery becomes, as it should, a live piece of poetic acting. And not only does the audience know what is going on in Cordelia: we also glimpse Lear through Shakespeare's eyes; we perceive the symbolism of the scene for its author, not because the actress has tried to make us see the symbol, but because she has needed the words to externalise what is within her in the person of the character.

To sum up, speaking as an academic, it seems necessary to say that these three performances suggest that what is fundamentally weak in modern Shakespearian acting derives from the academic failure to give to the theatre the sort of help which will enable actors to know exactly what their lines mean, or could mean, and which will enable them to relate the sense and the poetic implications of their lines to the emotional life of the characters they represent in performance.

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INFLUENCES ON THE AMATEUR THEATRE

By ALFRED EMMET

Based on extracts from an Address to the Fourth Congress of the International Amateur Theatre Association which Mr. Emmet attended as representative of the Little Theatre Guild of Great Britain.

NEW tendencies in writing for the theatre must first be examined, remembering that the amateur theatre draws from the professional most of the plays it performs. From the point of view of the English scene, there are two dominating influences. The first is what I may broadly call the American influence. The American plays which are influencing us so much are plays of toughness, plays of violence, with always a strong streak of sentimentality. The violence gives some illusion of vitality, a quality in which our own theatre has not been very strong in recent years. The sentimentality very often gives an illusion of profundity, an illusion that the author has something to say, an illusion of a 'message' and of a positive attitude. Perhaps the popularity of such American plays shows that our theatre needs vitality and wants a positive attitude. To the extent that this is so, we may in time achieve a vitality which is not dependent on violence and sex, and a positive attitude to life more profound and more true than that of the sentimentalist. Basically, this American influence is towards a theatre of 'togetherness', of people drawing closer to one another because of their essential common humanity.

The other main influence which I see is a quite contrary one—the French influence, represented particularly by Ionesco and Beckett. This might be described as the drama of anti-theatre, a theatre which is a theatre of non-action, because interaction is as impossible as intercommunication. This seems

to be a negative theatre, as opposed to the more positive attitude of the American theatre. Curiously enough, much of this negative theatre has derived from the existentialist theatre. I say 'curiously' because existentialism is, in fact, a positive philosophy, though it is not always understood to be so. What, for instance, could be more positive, more active or more vital than Sartre's *Les Mains Sales* or *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu*? But, on the other hand, existentialism with its emphasis on man being alone responsible for his own actions, underlines the sense of man's aloneness, which is the recurrent theme of writers like Ionesco. That is why existentialism may have paved the way to this negative attitude. This current French trend, in contradistinction to the American theatre of 'togetherness', seems to be towards a theatre where people are drawn apart because there is no common humanity to hold them together. Ionesco's characters are often in different orbits which never impinge. This kind of theatre leads to chaos and formlessness. I am not, by the way, in any sense criticising Ionesco's work, for which I have the greatest admiration.

In England, where we have very little continuous tradition of a serious attitude to the theatre and to playwriting, our young writers are prone to influences from abroad, and seem to have been caught between the conflicting influences of the American and the French theatres. In an agony of indecision between their strong need for a positive attitude to life and a suspicion that that leads to *bourgeois* values; be-



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tween a strong temptation to anarchy, because the whole of life seems on the brink of anarchy in this atom bomb age, and on the other hand an instinctive appreciation of the fact that anarchistic or tachist art must surely be impermanent, our young English writers work in a dreadful uncertainty. This is reflected both in the content and in the form of their work.

I suspect that the tendency to deliberate or wilful abandonment of form is more marked in England than elsewhere. I feel that Ionesco, and even Beckett, have more sense of form, and Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller a great deal more sense of form (perhaps almost too much of the carefully shaped workshop play) than our present young English writers of, for instance, the Royal Court Theatre school.

Lack of form in the writing leads inevitably to lack of form in production and in acting and even in décor. What is the influence on the amateur theatre of this particular tendency? In England, except for a handful of the better repertory theatres, our amateur little theatres and a few other groups with similar ideas come closest to the concept of permanent theatre companies with a continuous and developing artistic tradition. These amateur theatres naturally build their programme upon a mixture of classical and modern plays; of translations of plays from other countries and of English plays; with perhaps a sprinkling of new plays. It may be of interest to give the general pattern on which The Questors Theatre (with which I am associated) builds its season of plays. As similar patterns are followed by other amateur little theatres, it may be taken as in some measure typical. Out of seven productions in the season we aim to present:

- A British classic play
- A foreign classic play
- A modern English play
- A modern foreign play
- A new play

A play chosen to suit the restricted casting possibilities of our students

A 'free choice' which does not have to fit into any category, but is a play we very much want to do.

If such a group produces from time to time (as it doubtless will and certainly should) a play from, say, the Royal Court Theatre stable, the company will very likely precede it with a play by Shakespeare or Sheridan and follow it with a piece by Molière, Eugene O'Neill or Pirandello. As there must be a genuine attempt to find the particular style required for each of these plays there is less likelihood of formlessness affecting the general work of the group.

Turning to acting, the chief, or at least the most publicised, new trend in England is the so-called Method acting. One has to recognise that in the name of Method acting there is a tendency towards slovenly acting; towards mumbling acting; towards 'this is the way I feel it' kind of acting; towards undisciplined acting. All this is completely contrary to the teachings of Stanislavsky from whom the Method was originally derived, and arises indeed from a misinterpretation and a misunderstanding of the true ideas of the Actors' Theatre Studio of Lee Strasberg which is the fountain-head of the present Method acting.

It is interesting to note that these tendencies are parallel with the lack of form referred to earlier, with its reliance on the haphazard, and the inspiration of the moment. I am afraid that the amateur theatre in England is rather prone to be affected by the bad influences I have mentioned. Young actors, having half understood the Method, will try to put it into practice with disrupting effect. Amateur producers, with perhaps not very much understanding themselves of the Method, may be unable to guide and help youngsters sincerely trying to find a way to truth in their acting. The answer to the problem is for each amateur theatre to have its own training school for its young actors and

actresses, where perhaps the true Method, or at any rate *some* method of training and working, may be developed. It will almost certainly be derived from Stanislavsky and will provide for that group not only a standard but a unity of artistic purpose and a common artistic language and approach.

An increasing number of amateur groups in England already have their own training schemes providing a course of perhaps one year, perhaps two. It would be interesting to know whether there is any similar development in the amateur theatre in other countries, and if so, along what lines they work and what artistic methods they adopt. Is the American influence of Method acting affecting theatres in other countries? That also would be interesting to know. As I have said, if in England we have been influenced by tendencies from abroad, that is really because we have so little traditional artistic method of our own.

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THE GEOFFREY WHITWORTH THEATRE, CRAYFORD

Dame Sybil Thorndike and Sir Lewis Casson opened the Geoffrey Whitworth Theatre in Crayford, Kent, on October 4, 1959, in the presence of a distinguished company which included Mrs. Geoffrey Whitworth, Mr. Robin Whitworth, the Chairman of the Urban District of Crayford, the Mayors of Dartford and Bexley and four parliamentary candidates. The theatre, which is the home of the New Theatre Group, has been given the name of Geoffrey Whitworth because it was in Crayford in 1918 that a playreading by munition workers inspired Mr. Whitworth to found the British Drama League.

Dame Sybil referred to the remarkable development of the amateur theatre and the recent shrinkage of the professional theatre, and said that but for the work of the League the theatre in England might be in a much worse state than it was. The British Drama League, conceived in Crayford, exists to serve the interests of the living theatre as a whole, professional and amateur alike, and encourages the amateur, particularly in districts where there is no professional theatre.

The New Theatre Group, founded in 1948 by Arthur Simon and Alan H. Tipcraft, opened the theatre, a converted wooden hut on the same site as the new theatre, in 1952, and such was the support the Group received that in 1956 work was begun on the new theatre. The policy of the Group is to produce the classic plays of all countries and all ages and the best of modern plays. Some seventy-five have so far been produced including plays by Shakespeare, Shaw, Wilde, Jonson, Coward, Bridie, Barrie, Morgan, Cannan, Pinero, Ibsen, Chekhov, Lorca, Sartre, Spewack and the Quintero brothers. It is hoped that at least six plays, each running for one week, will be produced every season.

Most of the building work has been done by members of the Group. The total cost is about £13,000 of which £6,000 is still required. In building this theatre, which seats 153 people, it has been recognised that playgoing is not only a dramatic but also a social occasion and attention has been paid to the comfort of the audience as well as to back-stage facilities. The nearest professional theatre is at Bromley, about ten miles away, and the Geoffrey Whitworth Theatre therefore draws its audience from a very wide area.

The Group are going ahead in the belief that drama is important and is wanted, and that if they provide good living drama it will find an audience ready to respond and to support them. Crayford now provides an excellent example of what can be done by amateurs in places where the professional theatre no longer exists and at the same time commemorates the work of the far-sighted man who did so much for the theatre.

THEATRE BOOKSHELF

Molière

Molière: The Comic Mask by D. B. Wyndham Lewis. Eyre & Spottiswoode. 25s.

My connection with Molière is that I have adapted several of his plays for the English stage, which has given me a fairly intimate knowledge of him as a playwright and a curiosity about him as a man. There is of course an immense literature about him in French, but I should like to salute this new biography in English which is written vividly, with sympathy, insight and judgment. Just as we know exasperatingly little about Shakespeare it is strange that, although he was born but a half-century later, we seem to know exasperatingly too much about Molière. For so many of the stories of his often stormy and always crowded life are contradictory and unreliable, coming from his ruthless enemies or over-enthusiastic admirers. A biographer has to be very aware of this and critical of his sources, which Wyndham Lewis has been, and his book is therefore not only colourful and exciting but, one feels, truthful.

Molière was one of the greatest men of the theatre that ever lived and his full, tumultuous life was dominated by his theatrical relationships. When he was nearly forty he married a girl of eighteen—a member of his company, and herself a considerable actress—whom he had known since she was a child. She was the younger sister or the daughter—the raging controversy over this has never been resolved—of an old lover of his, another member of the company with whom he had started his acting career. For the rest of his life his young wife gave him much cause for the sufferings of jealousy. Yet I have always felt he despised jealousy. He often in his plays holds it up to ridicule, though always one can sense the suffering. One cannot, I would say, play any of the jealous old men without feeling this.

The analysis of the great plays, and especially when Wyndham Lewis is considering the influence of Molière's private life on the writing of them, I found fascinating. There is the superb *Le Misanthrope* in which, as Wyndham Lewis writes 'The squalid quarrels of the Molière ménage have been transmuted into golden and timeless magic', and the delicious but very poignant *School for Wives*.

To me, the key to an understanding of Molière's immense influence is that he was in his time essentially 'a modern'. And reading Wyndham Lewis's book has confirmed an idea that I have had for some time. I would suggest that the most important evening in Molière's life—and, one could add, in the life of the theatre—was the one on which he played before Louis XIV in Paris, after he had spent fourteen

years touring in the provinces. Fourteen years before he had been a disastrous failure; and, indeed, spent some time in a debtor's prison. Now he was trying to make a 'come-back'.

He started that memorable evening with a long tragedy which was a ghastly flop, and it must have seemed to everybody present that very little more would ever be heard of this Monsieur Molière. Then to a bored and disgruntled audience he announced that he would finish his programme with a twenty-minute sketch of his own which had been quite a favourite in the provinces, after which the King granted him a half-share in an important theatre in Paris. What can one make of that? It was, I believe, because in that short play of his own he behaved on the stage as people behave in life, and spoke his lines as people talk, which was completely revolutionary. His great rival died, it is said, bursting a blood vessel during a soliloquy. The contrast needs no underlining. The King, always very knowledgeable about the theatre, realised that something extraordinary had happened.

So the genius of Molière and the perception of the young king (he was four years Molière's junior) worked a miracle. And that to me is the most dramatic of illustrations as to how the theatre, like the world it mirrors, is always changing. But even in this precarious and swiftly-changing world of to-day, the changes in the theatre can be very gradual and indeed almost imperceptible, especially to those who are close to it or in it. To see the changes aright one has to stand back from them, as it were, and look at them over a period of years. Then it becomes evident that when changes in society have become fundamental and wide-spread enough some outstanding personalities in the theatre appear and give expression to these changes, producing different kinds of plays which demand different kinds of acting.

As an instance, Stanislavsky at the Moscow Art Theatre (and particularly through the great Chekhov plays) changed not only the course of the Russian but of the European Theatre. In London in 1906 Granville-Barker took the Court Theatre and produced Ibsen, Shaw and his own plays. Everything he did there was very different from the productions in which Irving, Tree, Martin-Harvey and the other great ones of their time had become deservedly famous, and eventually that comparatively short season in a small theatre in Sloane Square altered the course of English acting. So in Paris 300 years ago Molière, after that fabulous twenty minutes, writing and acting in his own plays altered the course of the French theatre—and ours into the bargain. So many of our dramatists have used his characters, scenes and plots for their own purposes.

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Indeed, to sum up, the Molière story for all theatre lovers is an exciting and an important one—and is, in this book, most excellently told. Moreover it can help us the better to recognise and assess the changes that are going on in our theatre to-day.

MILES MALLESON

Behind the Curtain

Entertainment in Russia by Faubion Bowers. Nelson. 42s.

Here is another vividly written report by an author whose three previous books on the Japanese theatre, on dance in India and on the theatre in the East had opened to grateful readers new worlds of entertainment which, owing to their inaccessibility, would have probably remained *terra incognita* to most.

This time Faubion Bowers takes us to entertainment in some parts of the U.S.S.R. It is unfortunate that the title promises more than is fulfilled for, geographically, only a small part of the U.S.S.R. is covered: Leningrad, where the author was impressed by a performance of *Swan Lake* in the Garden of Rest, described in two pages; Uzbekistan and its capital Tashkent, whose eight theatres are dealt with in seven pages; and Moscow where he spent nearly three months in assiduous theatre-going, a vivid report of which fills the rest of the book. The title, however, might lead the reader to expect an account of the wide and rapid development of the theatre not only in the capitals of the several Soviet Republics but in the provincial towns where for four decades the theatre has been an essential part of the educational and cultural programme.

Criticism apart, the author of this latest book on the subject (it covers the 1957-58 season) is as fair-minded and outspoken as a shrewd foreign observer can tactfully be who goes to the Soviet Union in this new and promising phase of our cultural relations. He did not go as an unprepared and exuberant tourist who can neither understand the language nor interpret what he sees—he went as one who understands some Russian, who knows the history of the Russian theatre and who has comparative values, since his knowledge of the world of the theatre ranges over the continents. He went to see whether the officially sponsored and favoured Soviet world of entertainment that plays so important a role in the lives of Soviet citizens had anything significant to offer the theatre outside the Soviet Union. He came away with the depressing conclusion that, unless another Stanislavsky or a Meyerhold were to come along, we had not nearly as much to learn from each other as we had thought. The benefit of cultural contact between theatres, he believes, is not in actual borrowing or copying, but in the 'stimulation of seeing how completely different the other country is'.

Faubion Bowers does not forget that the greatness of the Russian theatre is an established fact, not only in Moscow but abroad, but

he deplores the fact that the expectations raised by the period of invention and originality in the Russian theatre of the twenties and thirties were not fulfilled. The havoc of the Stalin years is still negatively and painfully apparent: in the disappearance of famous names in the theatre and in the scarcity of plays by Soviet playwrights. Fame and name, he observes, fluctuate in theatres all over the world, but perhaps nowhere has this been so thorough and so much due to non-theatrical causes as in the U.S.S.R. However, signs of a new era are apparent: plays by Soviet playwrights and on a great variety of themes are increasing.

In this thoroughness in visiting most of the twenty-nine Moscow theatres permanently operating, he realised the preponderance of foreign plays in translation. He saw two American plays where changes had been made in the original text, presumably for political or moral reasons. This was denied by the producer and our writer had not the tactless heart to contradict. He evinces some surprise at the number of international classics—apart from Shakespeare who is permanently popular—being treated with such earnestness and shown so frequently throughout the season. He wondered whether this was symptomatic of poverty in the national theatre. Might it not have been fairer to applaud the cultural policy and the educational value of bringing up generations of Soviet theatregoers to appreciate the world's masterpieces in drama? Though critical of some of the theatre production in the U.S.S.R., he never fails to praise the high level of acting and the splendid performance of individuals in an orchestrated cast. The classics of the Russian cast, loved and revered by their audiences as their cultural heritage, he found magnificent by any international standard of good theatre—and this particularly in the Moscow Art Theatre. Such praise, however, does not prevent him from commenting upon the unsuitable age of some of the actors in relationship to the characters they represented, the old-fashioned acting, the pace, and the cheerless and sombre interior of many of the theatres. Some theatres, he remarks, do not even look like theatres from the outside. The reason for this is simple: they are converted buildings. The new theatres, however, that have been and are being built are impressive and functional. Ballet, opera, drama, all come in for measured appraisal or gentle criticism, which if considered valid will no doubt be taken into account in the Soviet Union. There is a vivid account of *The Miraculous Bird*, a full-scale opera for children, that makes one hope to see it outside the U.S.S.R.; of the Animal Theatre and the remarkable Durov, its creator, who 'can make animals live with each other in peace'; of the most fabulous circus in the world; of acrobats and clowns; of jazz and cinema and Russian television.

The number of good illustrations generously support the text, but six of the pictures duplicating subjects might well have been omitted in preference for pictures of the outskirts of some of the places of entertainment the author visited.

Faubion Bowers assures us he was trying to write the truth and concludes his report with the thought that a clearer picture of Soviet life and ways of thinking and inner problems emerges from a study of entertainment than from enquiry into politics. If that is so, the reviewer can promise prospective readers, setting out with Faubion Bowers on an exploration of entertainment in Moscow, many new trains of thought.

ELIZABETH HILL

Brecht and his Background

Modern German Drama by H. F. Garten. Methuen. 21s. **Brecht: a Choice of Evils by Martin Esslin.** Eyre & Spottiswoode. 35s. **The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht by John Willett.** Methuen. 36s.

Dr. Garten has written a valuable survey of that vital period of German drama which began with the post-Ibsenite Hauptmann and has now reached the post-Brechtian Dürrenmatt. Indeed, his book is of additional interest when read as an introduction to the books on Brecht. In traversing the development and interaction of the naturalism of Hauptmann, the neo-romanticism of Schnitzler and Hoffmannsthal, the social satire of Wedekind, the Expressionism of Kaiser and Toller in the twenties, and the Nazi playwrights, he sketches plots and biographies, sets the plays in their social background and explains the effect of national history on their form. As a result, we are able to recognise some of the influences which moulded Brecht, or against which he violently reacted.

For example, Dr. Garten reminds us that while England had Shakespeare and France had Racine in the seventeenth century, Germany had no unified social and artistic background until much later, and the high tragic manner came in only with Goethe and Schiller at the end of the eighteenth century. As a result, the highflown classical manner in drama was often incongruously expressed in comparatively modern themes and we can understand why Brecht, although impressed by the revolutionary drama of Büchner's *Danton's Death*, in spite of its classical idiom, was driven by the windiness of Schiller's rhetoric and the ham of Schiller actors to grapple with the vernacular and raw reality. But, as Dr. Garten points out, the very lack of tradition spurred writers to draw freely from the most diverse sources and so helped them to give variety and vitality to the drama.

Mr. Esslin describes the boy Brecht at the village fair near his Bavarian home looking at the coloured 'panoramas' depicting such his-

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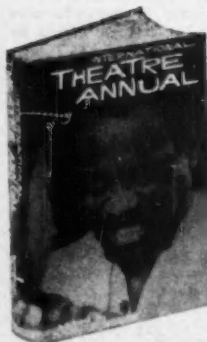
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THEATRE ANNUAL No. 4

Edited by HAROLD HOBSON

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torical scenes as *The Shooting of the Anarchist Ferrer* at Madrid, and this must surely have subconsciously influenced the writing of the epic chronicle dramas with their descriptive legends? Indeed, both Mr. Willett and Mr. Esslin study closely the interrelationship of Brecht's life with his work. Both books are very detailed and their accounts sometimes run parallel, with information from one reinforcing that of the other. Mr. Willett's book has many rare photographs of Brecht and his productions from the earliest days and is so copiously annotated as often to read like a dossier.

Mr. Esslin's book is framed by the terms of his thesis. He defines Brecht's 'choice of evils' as 'between lavishly subsidised but severely restricted conditions in a Communist state on the one hand and the limitations on the artist imposed on him by a free, but commercial, society'. Brecht himself rebelled against his bourgeois Lutheran background and became a socialist under the stress, misery and chaos of the 1914 war and its aftermath. But through these books we see the origin in his experiences of that schizophrenic split between his sensitive compassionate nature, tormented by its impotence to aid suffering, and his keen intellect which preserved sanity by controlling compassion and diagnosing the social surgery necessary to cure evil. That is, as Mr. Esslin emphasises, the dichotomy in Brecht's personality anticipated the Marxian dialectic in which it later found confirmation. Brecht was Marxist by nature as another might be Christian by nature, an artist before he was a politician. He felt in himself the dual relationship of Shen Te and Shui Ta in *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, and in his own experience that isolation of the individual in society which makes it necessary for Grusha's goodness to fight the selfishness of the world and which destroys Mother Courage.

We see Brecht in 1918, a medical orderly aged 20, dissecting corpses, trepanning brains, sewing up the wounded and pronouncing them fit for duty. A bottled-up near-hysteria, in which death seemed unreal and comic and corpses looked like grotesque dummies, must have driven him to write *The Legend of the Dead Soldier*, to present the giant nightmare soldiers on stilts in *Mann ist Mann*, and in the *Badener Lehrstück* to have a giant clown sawn in half, horrifying the audience and driving Gerhart Hauptmann from the theatre, disgusted and impressed.

While Kaiser and Toller and the Expressionists were trying to encompass cosmic issues by dramatising abstractions about mankind (and being derisively labelled the 'O Mensch' school) Brecht came to terms with the squalid individual man. Like Pirandello, he saw the relativism of character, but he saw it in social terms. In that chaotic world of 1920 Germany where nothing mattered or lasted, he dived into the beatnik world of Dadaism, jazz and

the stews. Inspired by Wedekind, he wrote social satire for cabaret, he absorbed the gutter poetry of Villon and his travesties of English soldiery have the half-truth of a sinister caricature. What might have been a dead-end became an avenue to Marxism. His Lutheran nature needed a frame in the chaos and the Bible was replaced by *Das Kapital*. Now his artistic intuition and human compassion were reinforced by a philosophical system. The duality of heart and head, the shifting relationship of man and men, the stark all-important reality of an objective world which had to be faced and mastered could be expressed in writing, acting and production in clear illustration of Marxian dialectics.

Both authors fully describe the productions and indicate the multifarious influences, from Elizabethan drama, from Chaplin and the films generally and from Chinese theatre and the Japanese Nô. At first, his plays were frankly didactic, becoming more avowedly political as Hitler rose to power and the need increased for efficient counter-propaganda. But when Hitler was defeated, and Brecht was invited to return to a Communist East Germany, he is shown as evasive in his relations with the Party. And, says Mr. Esslin, with reason. Mr. Esslin's tragic climax is that now the Party inspired by the philosophy of dialectical materialism was in power, Brecht was restrained from expressing his individual interpretation of its dialectics by that very principle of dialectics (which he himself had taught in his play *Der Jasager*) that the individual must subordinate himself to the will of the group!

Brecht compromised and must have remembered his own play *Galileo*. In fact, we may still take sides as to whether Brecht or the Party was right when it censured his view that destiny was not in the control of individuals and that drama must be viewed from the outside so that the individual may be seen in the grip of social forces. The Party, especially in Russia, wanted to see more signs of individual responsibility and of optimism. Either through development in his views, or through Party pressure, Brecht changed the generic title of his plays from didactic to dialectical and now said that they were written not to define decisions but to explore situations and to suggest solutions. But still, how can Mr. Esslin justify Brecht in giving two contradictory answers to one moral problem in *Der Jasager* and *Der Neinsager*? This is no example of a dialectic changing with a changing situation as in Ibsen's variations on his theme. It seems to be the example of a man reluctant to commit himself, presumably for Party reasons.

Nevertheless, his later development is shown leading to the admission that plays ought not only to instruct but also to entertain, and to plays which required no theoretical arguments to prove that they were theatrically fascinating. Reading many Brecht plays one feels that they make heavy weather of issues that Shaw could

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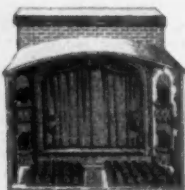
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have Brechtianly 'estranged' by holding them up to ridicule. (Indeed, Shaw's preface to *Three Plays by Brecht* fully anticipates Brecht.) Brecht is far more important as a producer than as a writer.

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HENRY ADLER

Problems of the Theatre

The Psychology of the Actor by Yoti Lane. Secker & Warburg. 16s.

Miss Lane's book was given much press attention because of its chapter on homosexuality in the theatre; this, no doubt, was 'news' in the Fleet Street sense. But there was more important matter included than the opinion, doubtless accurate, that 'during the past thirty years the homosexual has obtained a strong foothold in the theatre' and that 'any young actor at the beginning of his career is fair game for the influential homosexual. If he does not respond, bitter hostility may result.' The remedy, in Miss Lane's view (it is also the view of many) is no longer to regard homosexuality as a crime. (A crime, as the Wolfenden Report insisted, is not identical with a moral fault; sins are not necessarily crimes). If the fear of criminal prosecution were removed 'homosexuals would cease to be a secret society and, to a very great extent, would stop helping each other in the theatre as they do at present.' For 'helping each other' most heterosexual actors would probably write 'ganging up'. Feeling runs strong and it is not altogether conspiracy mania.

To many readers one of the most interesting features of a book which ranges beyond the exact implication of its title and discusses theatre problems in general, will be the chapter on amateurs. Miss Lane has had wide experience in training at the City Literary Institute and Cambridge House. She manages to write her section on amateurs without bringing in the word 'vanity'. Her own experience has brought her in touch especially with the student who comes from a drab background so that 'his acting class is a magic casement which enables him to form a new concept of his own life and the world around him. He learns that to be articulate about all sorts of ideas and impressions is neither "daft" nor "soppy" but natural and stimulating.' The result is a release from social and cultural handicaps.

Apart from considerations of art Miss Lane can state a strong case for the practical utility of spare time devoted to amateur acting, and it is a case which should be appreciated by those authorities, not only educational, whose members are apt to dismiss the amateur as an exhibitionist and probably incompetent as well

and regard any grant or endowment as a subsidy to a bit of nonsense. She has seen the young recruit who at first is shy, inaudible, awkward, and careless in dress and grooming, become tidy, self-confident and at ease, with his or her whole personality developed, invigorated and strengthened in initiative. She makes no claims for the artistic result and seems seriously to underrate amateur work. She is here apt to be inconsistent. On page 107 she says that the amateur theatre in England has 'contributed little or nothing to theatrical art as a whole', forgetting that Sir Barry Jackson's Birmingham Repertory grew from an amateur group and that many of our leading actors began in amateur companies and might never have proceeded to professional triumphs without that start. Surely, too, there have been and are many amateur societies who offer fine productions. On the previous page she states that Dublin's Abbey Theatre is unique in that plays written by amateurs for amateurs created the link between the amateur theatre and the professional. For those plays and players she expresses an admiration generally shared. How brilliant they were, especially when they were just emerging from amateur status!

Miss Lane's book covers a large variety of playhouse topics in a commonsense way. She evidently has studied the theatre in Holland closely and has much to say of its social structure and shrewd endowment. The section on the amateurs, while ungenerous to their artistic achievement, is admirable in its exposition of what stage work can do to strengthen personality and assist a career in ordinary life. One could challenge, however, her statement that 'the most publicised amateur company in Great Britain is the Oxford University Dramatic Society' and that it is a prolific source of professional actors and producers. That is the history of the 1930's. At Oxford now it is the experimenters outside the O.U.D.S. who get into the news and the Festivals and the reputation of the Marlowe Society at Cambridge has for some years been the highest among University Clubs: it is Cambridge that has recently sent out the rising players and producers and has given Stratford-upon-Avon its youngest director, Peter Hall. I write as an Oxford man.

IVOR BROWN

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D.B.H.

Aristophanes into Lallans

The Burdies by Douglas Young. Published by the author at Makarsfield, Tayport, Fife, Scotland. 6s.

Douglas Young, Hellenist, of St. Andrews University, is well-known to Scots for his various political and scholastic 'ploys' as well as for his poetry. He has been a strong supporter and practitioner of the broad Scots speech or Lallans. His version in that tongue of *The Frogs* by Aristophanes was received with acclaim, even by English scholars, and was successfully produced by student actors in St. Andrews and Edinburgh. *The Birds* has now received the same happy treatment. Sir Maurice Bowra paid tribute to Mr. Young's skill in 'catching the neatness and sharpness of the Greek', and justly so.

It is idle to recommend these translations, with their Scottish references as well as Scottish vocabulary, to actors and audiences outside Scotland. But for collegiate societies in Scotland they offer an admirable mixture of poetry and comedy. *The Burdies* can easily be appreciated by those who know no Greek and the reader with no Scots has an ample glossary for his enlightenment. But he need

not consult it very often, for the words naturally take the eye and ear and declare their quality.

The Birds, an Athenian war-time play, contains a mockery of human follies that is as enduring as it is engaging. It also has its passages of lyrical beauty and to both the satire and the song Mr. Young has been adroitly faithful.

I. B.

Long Plays

The House of Rosmer, a new English version of 'Rosmersholm' by Brian J. Burton. Cambridge. Birmingham. 10s. 6d. (paper 6s. 6d.) This play was presented at the Crescent Theatre in April this year and proved very successful. The adaptation is fluent and easy, written with a feeling for the theatre, and has done no disservice to Ibsen's play. (4 m., 2 f.)

Jane Eyre by Constance Cox from the novel by Charlotte Brontë. Garnet Miller. 6s. Costume 1847-8. This play, adapted from the author's successful TV serial, won the *Newspaper Chronicle* award for 1956. It preserves the spirit of the original, whilst keeping the action swift-moving and dramatic, and is recommended to societies who are interested in a dramatised version of this remarkable novel. (4 m., 7 f. one set.)

Brothers-in-Law by Ted Willis and Henry Cecil, from the novel by Henry Cecil. French. 6s. This play is in the light comedy tradition, but has the advantage of a novel setting. Fun is extracted out of the mystique of a profession which is still regarded with a certain amount of awe. (11m. 4 f., one set.)

Four in Hand by Michael Brett. Evans. 6s. This light comedy was originally performed before the Queen and her Ascot house-party at the Theatre Royal, Windsor. According to the author, it is about falling in love. The characters are mostly very well-dressed, have plenty of money, a great deal of leisure and a Toulouse Lautrec. The comedy is dexterously handled, and would demand very polished acting from the four protagonists. (2 m., 2 f. one set.)

Witch Errant by W. A. Dick. Evans. 6s. Described as an improbable comedy, this play exploits the situation of two diametrically opposed women whose characters are exchanged by the machinations of a rather unsuccessful witch, so that the body of Gertrude, a frustrated, intellectual governess, houses the charming character of Elizabeth, a ballet dancer, and vice-versa, with amusing results. (4 m., 7 f. two sets.)

Cry Dawn in Dark Babylon by P. W. Turner. S.P.C.K. 5s. The author describes this play as a dramatic meditation on the subject of death, the Resurrection and the Church, stemming from St. Paul's words 'Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead; for as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive'. Much of it is pungently written with a feeling for dramatic dialogue, but the attempt to

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Hans, the Witch and the Gobbin by Alan Cullen. French. 5s. This children's play shows a refreshing abundance of invention. The action moves swiftly and the dialogue is on the whole entertaining. Particularly charming are the two pigs, Hank and Hunk. It is almost impossible to say what sort of plays children like, but this would seem to be a better bet than most.

Woman in a Dressing Gown by Ted Willis. Barry & Rockliff. 18s. Besides the title play, this volume of plays for Television includes *The Young and the Guilty* and *Look in any Window*. The author's interesting preface, *The Writer and Television*, contains many valuable thoughts on writing for this medium. He is particularly interesting on Paddy Chayevsky's remarks about 'this marvellous world of the ordinary' and these extremely effective plays explore, with a great deal of point, aspects of that 'marvellous world'.

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Cloud over the Morning by T. B. Morris. French. 2s. (4 m., 7 f.) A topical play, implicitly against violence, showing how children in Cyprus took part in the 'troubles'.

The Landlady's Brother by C. Neilson-Gatley and Z. Bramley-Moore. French. 2s. (7 f.) A comedy of life in a private hotel, a brother who never appears and two murders which didn't happen.

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FULL STAGE TRAINING DAY COURSE

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AMATEUR THEATRE

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Stratford-upon-Avon, 1959, by I.B. Winter

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- Granville-Barker and the Savoy by W. Bridges-Adams Spring
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(Under the supervision of Geoffrey Crump, M.A., Hon.R.A.M.)

This is a full-time course of three years' duration, for men and women, intended primarily for teachers, leading to the award of the R.A.M. Teacher's Diploma (Speech and Drama), which is accepted by the Ministry of Education for qualified teacher status. The course also affords a comprehensive training for the stage.

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The fees are thirty pounds per term with an entrance fee of two guineas.

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Examinations for this (external) Diploma in Speech and Drama, and in Mime, are held during the Easter, Summer and Christmas vacations.

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Recently students have been engaged at the Alexandra Theatre, Birmingham; Edinburgh Festival; Midland Theatre Co., Coventry; Arena Theatre; Repertory Theatres at Birmingham, Sheffield, Colchester, Wolverhampton, Chesterfield, Guildford, Derby, Morecambe, Perth, Little Theatre, Bristol.

Patricia Cox, I.T.V., Channel 8 Newscaster trained and placed by this School.
Students are also "on call" to many Midland Theatres.

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Rehearsal Rooms, Small Theatre, Workshop, Properties, Costumes, Extensive Library.

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THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

PATRON: H.R.H. QUEEN ELIZABETH, THE QUEEN MOTHER

BRIEF CHRONICLES

THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The National Theatre, the Festival, League activity in the provinces, and the encouragement of Youth in the theatre were the main topics discussed at the Annual Conference held in London early in October. The idea of Study Groups, each with its own specialist theme, proved a successful innovation, as it enabled delegates to discuss in detail the subject of their particular interest and still gave them an opportunity to comment on the other Group subjects when the Group chairmen reported in due course to the full Conference. The discussions provided many valuable suggestions for later consideration by the Council and the N.C.C.D.

Aspects of a National Theatre were debated at length by Anthony Quayle, Richard Findlater and Benn Levy, with Sir William Emrys Williams in the chair. The speeches and discussions were very lively and resulted in the following resolution being passed unanimously:

This meeting is convinced that the building of a National Theatre on the site provided by the L.C.C. would stimulate the living theatre throughout the country and raise our national prestige throughout the world. It urges that the National Theatre Act 1949 be implemented forthwith and recommends that, as soon as the building of a National Theatre is sanctioned, steps should be taken to create and prepare a suitable national theatre company.

The resolution reflects two of the main points of the discussion: (a) the urgent necessity of preparing a company before the theatre is built, and (b) the leadership which a National Theatre would give to all theatre activity in this country.

Other highlights were the theatre visits (to the Mermaid, the Queens, the Royal Court and the Questors), the after-the-show party at the Questors, the visits to the Royal Opera House and Strand Electric theatre, and the film of *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* by the Comédie Française. A more detailed account of the Conference will be published in the next issue of "Brief Chronicles".

AT HOME—

National Festival 1959-1960

The 1959-60 festival season has begun and throughout the country the preliminary stages are now being held. The area finals this season will be held as follows:—

NORTHERN AREA	
Coronation Hall, Ulverston	May 21st
(Subject to confirmation)	
WESTERN AREA	
Technic & College Theatre, Coveley	May 28th
EASTERN AREA	
Scala Theatre, London	May 30th
WALES	
Coliseum, Aberdare	May 28th

The British Final Festival will be held on Saturday, June 25th at the Opera House, Belfast. The organisation arrangements are in the hands of the Association of Ulster Drama Festivals, where booking will open on April 1st.

Messrs. Nestle Ltd. have promised once again to contribute generously to the expenses of festival competitors by their renewal of the Nescafe Awards.

The writing and presentation of original plays will receive encouragement again this year through the original One-Act Play competition, which will be judged (in manuscript) by Ivor Brown, and the Full-Length Play competition which will be judged (in performance) by Lyn Oxenford. Details regarding both these competitions from the Administrator, 9 Fitzroy Square, London, W.C.1.

AFTERTHOUGHT:

When the Belfast Dramatic Circle won the British Final Festival for Northern Ireland with *Liberation*, the Countess of Antrim, President of the A.U.D.F., reminded the assembled finalists and their supporters that the Ulster motto was "What we have we hold". She was holding the Howard De Walden Cup at the time, so that next year's Finals in Belfast will represent a real challenge to the finalists from England, Scotland and Wales.

Kent

Frances Mackenzie and Donald FitzJohn conducted a week-end course in Folkestone in mid-October, organised (most efficiently) by the Kent Council of Social Service. The course was for actors and producers, and the students numbered more than a hundred.

Cumberland

The Cumberland Drama League has begun the 1959-60 season with an impressive programme of dramatic activity: a Drama Day (September 26th) in Workington, with an

opening talk by Val Gielgud; encouragement to visit the new theatre at Roschill with an offer to League members of price concessions; a Week-end Acting School in November at Keswick; a Full-length Play Festival and a Junior One-Act Play Festival. Details from the Hon. Secretary, 5 Portland Square, Carlisle.

As their effort for World Refugee Year, The Green Room Club of Carlisle presented *Cockpit* by Bridget Boland during the week beginning September 28th.

Cheshire

On October 24th Colonel R. W. West, O.B.E. (Hon. Treasurer), represented the League Council at one of the three performances given by the Cheadle Hulme Amateur Dramatic Society to celebrate the opening of their new theatre.

The C.H.A.D.S. was founded in 1921 and began to save up for a theatre of its own in 1938 when £30 was set aside as the nucleus of a building fund. A site was found in 1952 and work began on clearing it. Building began in 1957 and the new theatre, now open and operating, fully justifies all the time and effort spent in fund raising and physical hard labour in site clearing and building assistance. The building is estimated to have cost £5,000, most of which has already been raised—and spent.

The In-Stage Theatre

Just nine months ago, In-Stage set up its headquarters at the British Drama League. Its intention was, through intensive training and relentless self-criticism, to try and forge that most delicate of all artistic instruments, the acting-company.

Since that time, many people have seen fit to ask me, why? Why corral a group of fifteen or twenty actors and try to develop a Company? Why not just "put on plays"?

The answer, quite simply, is that the history of theatre is a history of permanent companies. A company serves as a focal-point, not only for the creative efforts of actors and producers, but for writers as well. From the Chamberlain's Men to the Duke of York's Company; from the Vieux Colombier right up to the companies of Jean Louis Barrault and Jean Vilar; from the Provincetown Playhouse to the Group Theatre, the pattern has continually repeated itself.

The acting-company, because it possesses stability, can afford the extravagance of trial and error. Consequently, a quantity of actors develop into a skilled ensemble; one or two producers learn the intricacies of their craft, and a handful of writers develop to the peak of their abilities. The playwrights who have grown out of permanent companies include names as dissimilar as Shakespeare, Congreve, Molière, O'Neil, Odets, Giraudoux, Obey and

BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE HOLIDAYS

CONTINENTAL TRAVELLING with the BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE carries the advantage of meeting people with similar interests on wander-at-will holidays at friendly prices! Throughout the 1959 Summer Season, we flew a series to ESTARTIT giving two weeks on the Costa Brava; a fourteen-days two centre flight to LUCERNE/LUGANO and a week-end trip to PARIS. We also arranged short visits to Paris by rail/sea which included theatre shows and introductions backstage; in addition, our programme covered the International Festival of Music at Lucerne. At present, some of our members are enjoying a fortnight in PALMA de MALLORCA.

You may be interested to know that, in this the first year of our association with the League members seem really to have enjoyed themselves, judging by their letters!

"I would like to tell you how pleased we were. We have not ceased to be amazed at how you have succeeded in giving such a cheap holiday without stinting anything. We have not a single complaint. Please, pass on to Pegasus Airlines our appreciation of their splendid services."—J.J.W.

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Now, following our previous success, we are offering an increased programme for 1960 which again features Estartit. Members may book individually or as a club. Visits to the Passion Play at Oberammergau have been planned, introductions backstage will be made on request, at Oberammergau and at other centres where applicable.

For the OLYMPIC GAMES there will be two special departures, as follows:—

August 21st: Twelve nights in ROME and two nights in SPERLONGA at a price of 63 gns. and 61 gns.

September 4th: Seven nights in ROME and seven nights in SPERLONGA at a price of 56 gns. and 55 gns.

HOTELS Rome — Pensione Florida, situated in the traditional English quarter of Rome, a comfortable establishment, quiet and friendly and the cuisine is very good. Cheaper tours are based on the Pensione Shelley, frequented by our clients for many years. At Sperlonga, the Hotel Amiclea is on the beach.

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PRICES AND PLACES FOR PURSES AND PEOPLE!

Our Holidays are fully inclusive, even covering coaches to U.K.
Airport and MTCA Charges. With the League there are no extras.

SPAIN

ESTARTIT

Accommodation in twin-bedded rooms with hot and cold water.

A. SERIES

Hotel Las Medas. (Used last year)

A comfortable, simple establishment, with good food, keynote: "Welcome". Situated within a few yards of the sea, close to interesting shops and a number of small bars. Backed by fragrant pinewoods. There are good walks in the neighbourhood; two night clubs, coach and sea excursions.

ESTARTIT

B. SERIES

Accommodation in twin-bedded rooms with hot and cold water.

Hotel Fonda Tipica.

Good plain cooking; situated near to the sea. Under friendly capable management. Our accommodation is in the building now under construction.

NOTE: April 15th departure is a Special 19-day Easter Tour.

WHAT A PRICE!

C. SERIES ESTARTIT

Accommodation in twin-bedded rooms with hot and cold water.

Hotels—Hotel Vila, situated one minute from beach near Medas. Very comfortable, excellent meals. Supplement for rooms with shower at Vila—2 gns.

Hotel Montserrat—facing beach, simple Spanish inn. Cold water only, suit young people. A lively establishment.

Prices: Montserrat—2 gns. cheaper than Vila throughout.

BY AIR CHARTER

NOTE: Variations in first and last departures give a 'breath of French air.'

Departures: Monday mornings, return Monday evenings.

	Price
May 9	29 Gns.
May 23	31 Gns.
June 6; July 4; September 12	32½ Gns.
July 18; August 1	34 Gns.
First Departure: April 24 (Sunday) by Rail, home by Air on Monday, May 9. Three nights stay in Paris on outward journey	27½ Gns.
Last Departure: September 26 (Monday) by Air, home by rail with three nights in Paris on the way home, arrive London, Sunday, October 9	26 Gns.

Departures: Monday mornings, return Monday evenings.

	Price
May 2, 16	29 Gns.
May 30; June 13	30½ Gns.
June 27; July 11; September 5	31½ Gns.
July 25; August 8, 22	33 Gns.
First Departure: April 15 (Good Friday), out by rail, home by Air on Monday May 2. Four nights Paris on outward journey	29 Gns.
Last Departure: September 19 (Monday) out by Air, home by Rail on Sunday, October 2 (three nights Paris on homeward journey	26 Gns.

Departures: Sundays, Mid-morning, return Sunday Evenings. Based on Hotel Vila.

	Prices
May 8	30 Gns.
May 22; September 11	32 Gns.
June 5, 19; July 3	34 Gns.
July 17, 31; August 14, 28	37 Gns.
April 23 (Saturday) out by rail—home by Air on Sunday May 8	27 Gns.
September 25 (Sunday) out by Air, home by Rail October 9	27 Gns.
Three nights Paris each way	

SPAIN MAJORCA (Balearic Islands) PALMA—TWO WEEKS

Hotel California—under Dutch management, has an excellent cuisine.

Accommodation: twin-bedded rooms with seaview. (Supplement for rooms with private bath/terrace.)—2 gns.

Palma holidays are superb, wonderful bathing, variety of entertainment day and night, splendid excursions to beaches/mountains. Cheap drinks and taxis! Shopping at most reasonable prices in this Capital City!

AIR CHARTER

Departures: Friday nights, return Saturday afternoons.

	Prices
April 14, 29; October 14	34 Gns.
May 13, 27; June 10; September 16, 30	36 Gns.
June 24; July 8	37 Gns.
July 22; August 5, 19; September 2	39 Gns.

SPAIN SOLLER—Bargain Holiday

Sea and mountain air.

Hotel Ferrocarril—under personal supervision of proprietress, our friend; good cooking. Soller will put you in 'fine fettle'; it is bright, amusing, with attractive shops. Swim at Puerto Soller's beach; frequent tram service. Drinks are comparatively for nothing. Lunch available on Hotel Marisol, on beach, at no extra charge.

Departures: Saturday nights, return Sunday afternoons.

Prices

May 7, 21; October 8 ... 32½ Gns.

June 4, 18; July 2, September 24 34½ Gns.

July 16, 30; August 27;
September 10 ... 36½ Gns.

**ITALY ROME 5 Days—
Remainder at SPERLONGA**

ROME: Hotel Ginevra—excellent cuisine, comfortably equipped rooms, situated City centre. ROME is more fabulous than legend. SPERLONGA—for relaxation by the Tyrrhenian Sea in tranquil surroundings. This town is about 75 miles from Rome, standing on a hill overlooking two bays. There are many small bars and two beaches, one sandy, on which the hotel Amiclae is situated. This is a fine new building with modern layout.

TWO WEEKS

Departures: Sunday nights, return Monday afternoons.

AIR CHARTER TO ROME

May 15 ... 43 Gns.

May 29 ... 44½ Gns.

June 12, 26 ... 45½ Gns.

July 10 ... 46½ Gns.

July 24; August 7 ... 49 Gns.

CATTOLICA — Via RIMINI AIRPORT

Hotel Pensione Flora—comfortable, modern, twin-bedded rooms with hot and cold water. Under careful management. Situated about 120 yards from sea. Use of bathing cabins included.

The popular town of Cattolica lies on a two-mile stretch of fine sand bordering the entrancing Adriatic Sea where you can delight in many kinds of open-air sport by day, and a very gay life in the evening. Night Clubs and cafes are open nearly all the time.

TWO WEEKS

Departures: Sunday nights, return Monday afternoons.

Prices

May 22 ... 29½ Gns.

June 5; September 11 ... 31½ Gns.

June 19; July 3; August 28 ... 33½ Gns.

July 17, 31; August 14 ... 37 Gns.

NOTE: May 7 Saturday departure, out by Rail, home by Air ... 26½ Gns.

COACH TOURS

By modern Pullman Coach—(Brief details): all meals included except where stated otherwise, commencing dinner on first day, ending with breakfast on last day.

1. ROMANTIC RHINELAND St. Goarshausen. EIGHT DAYS 22 Gns.

Departures: Sunday June 5 to September 17, ex. Victoria Rail/Sea/Coach; Brussels, Ardennes, Battlefields, Luxembourg, St. Goarshausen, Cologne, Antwerp, Ostend, Dover. High Season Charge: 1½ Gns. Supplement for single rooms (if available, very limited number): 2 Gns.

2. FRENCH RIVIERA/NICE. Bargain Tour. TWELVE DAYS. 29 Gns.

Departures: Mondays from May 16 to September 26, ex. Victoria, Rail/Sea/Ostend, coach Lille, Cambrai, Montelimar, Cannes, Nice (seven nights half-pension, lunch not included) Avignon, Paris, Dover. High Season Charge: 2 Gns. Supplement—single rooms: 3 Gns.

3. MOSCOW TOUR SIXTEEN DAYS 59 Gns.**OBERAMMERGAU**

Viking Flight to Munich, onward Price
coach travel to Oberammergau; £26/10/.
two nights stay, visit Passion Play,
accommodation and meals
Departure: Out Sept. 17; home Sept. 19

COACH TOURS

12 DAYS. IGLS—OBERAMMERGAU
Two departures: July 10; Aug. 28 34 Gns.

SUGGESTIONS WELCOMED

For instance—Tour of Dutch Bulb Fields, or International Floriad at Rotterdam. Can you make up a party? Apply for leaflet.

PARIS-IN-SPRINGTIME

Space available on our Annual
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3. IS YOUR PASSPORT IN ORDER?

(If any doubt please send it to us for examination.)

(Note: Please send me details of holidays which you will be operating in 1960.)

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Do you require London accommodation before or after the Tour. If so, please state details.

I enclose remittance value £3/£5 being preliminary booking deposit per person (first instalment towards cost of holiday.)

I agree to accept on behalf of all members of my party, Sir Henry Lunn Ltd., conditions of booking as stated on their official Booking Form (Copy on request.)

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Date _____

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A company which only trains is only half a company. In order to live up to the implication of its title it has got to perform as well, and now In-Stage will be doing just that.

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PUBLISHED BY THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE, 9 FITZROY SQUARE, LONDON, W.1 and
PRINTED BY THOMAS KNIGHT & CO. LTD., THE CLOCK HOUSE PRESS
HODDESDON, HERTS

